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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000816

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTH OSSETIA ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS LAW MOVES
THROUGH PARLIAMENT

REF: TBILISI 641

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4(b)&(d).

Summary

11. (SBU) Parliament Speaker Nino Burjanadze briefed the diplomatic corps April 11 on the draft law establishing a new autonomous status for South Ossetia, which had passed Parliament in second reading just hours earlier. Parliament passed the bill in third and final reading April 13. Burjanadze and European Integration Committee chair David Bakradze explained that the law was intentionally not detailed, and that many specifics of the autonomy would be worked out in consultations between the Georgian government and representatives of the local population. They stressed that all representatives would be invited to take part in these talks, including de facto "president" Kokoity and "alternative president" Sanakoyev. They called for international support for the initiative, which they said was designed to give the people of South Ossetia a role in determining their future and would guarantee European-style autonomy and preservation of ethnic identity. Following the bill's final passage, opposition leader Davit Gamkrelidze publicly called on both Kokoity and Sanakoyev to participate.
End Summary.

Tbilisi Not Dictating Details of Autonomy

12. (SBU) Burjanadze explained to assembled ambassadors that the draft law was designed to promote peaceful conflict resolution by guaranteeing rights and building cooperation with the population of South Ossetia (translation of draft law faxed to EUR/CARC). Recognizing opposition faction leaders present in the briefing, she stressed that this initiative had the unified support of all parties, and she noted the bill passed in second reading April 11 with support from all but one MP. Burjanadze said Georgia was open to meetings with any representatives of South Ossetian communities, including Kokoity.

13. (SBU) Bakradze said the initiative would increase the South Ossetian population's participation in the peace process, and he stressed that all political forces would have the opportunity to take part. He conceded that some were likely to be more interested than others, but he stressed that the door was open to all. He explained that Georgia did not intend to obstruct existing mechanisms in the peace process, but given the lack of progress Georgia was also looking for new approaches. He said the initiative was intended to create conditions for a wide, European-style autonomy with provisions for real self-government and preservation of ethnic identity, while creating conditions for democratic elections.

14. (SBU) Bakradze noted that the draft law did not define the

majority of functions of the new administrative unit. He said the Georgian government had not wanted to do this unilaterally, but would instead, after the law was promulgated and the new unit formally created, invite all representatives of the community to participate in consultations to decide jointly on the structure, competencies, and name of the temporary entity. Once agreement was reached with participating forces, those forces would then be delegated power as the administration of an autonomous region. He stressed that they would not be considered presidential appointees or part of the Georgian executive branch.

Russian Ambassador: Will Kokoity Agree?

15. (SBU) During the question period, the Russian Ambassador asked if the Georgian government had already consulted with Sanakoyev and Kokoity, and if it was "sure Kokoity is open to negotiations." Burjanadze reiterated that Georgia was open to speaking with both sides. She noted that Georgia had made many overtures for meetings with Kokoity, and remained ready if the de facto authorities showed interest in talks. She said there were indications that Sanakoyev is ready to participate in "serious consultations." Burjanadze added that the international community, especially the OSCE and Russia, could play a constructive role in encouraging Kokoity to participate, commenting that she was sure he would do so if Russia "strongly recommends" it. Following the briefing, the Russian Ambassador told the press assembled outside the room that the Georgian initiative was a step in the wrong direction.

Comment

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16. (C) While the Georgians do not expect Kokoity to participate in the consultations envisioned in the law, they are putting the ball in his court to say no. Burjanadze and Bakradze were careful to stress that they also do not consider Sanakoyev a legitimately elected leader, and at this stage he is merely one of multiple community representatives who will be invited to the talks. Bakradze did say, however, that Sanakoyev's emergence sent an important message of reconciliation: that a man who fought the Georgians with a Kalashnikov in his hands could now be their partner in the peace process. Clearly the Georgians see Sanakoyev as the eventual leader of the new administrative unit, but they have significantly modified their description of the entity since Saakashvili announced the idea in March. At that time, one top official suggested the new entity could be headed by a presidentially appointed governor (reftel), something that would resemble the practice in other Georgian regions. Now, they are planning to sit down with Sanakoyev (and possibly others) to hammer out an autonomous status that provides special guarantees for self-government and minority rights.

TEFFT